

Many of us come into the work of Peer Support out of a desire to serve others and a sense of injustice that has befallen us in our struggle with mental health or substance use. This call to service makes us vulnerable to burnout. We often push ourselves into giving everything of ourselves both at work and at home and may not take the necessary efforts to create strong boundaries and ability to say no to demanding workloads. So how do we as Peer Support Professionals create the type of lifestyle and work environment that makes us better providers and human beings all around for ourselves, our peers, and our colleagues?

One of the key elements of surviving in the business is the Art of Being Vulnerable. That requires creating a strong support network of people in one's life that one can turn to outside one's work environment where one can refuel one's well of emotional, spiritual and mental needs. This is highly important when one is in the provider role to others. This is also important if one is also a caregiver at home along with at work. Finding people in one's life who can provide that very necessary role of giving the needed support and advice that allows one to avoid drama and emotional burnout in one's life is key to having an endlessly replenish able supply of emotional support for your peers at work. Being the strong and invincible army of one is not all it's cracked up to be and will in end be the killer of your career. So reach out make solid and good friendships that are equally give and take on both sides and have family relationships that also give and take on an equal basis. You will find this kind of relationship feeds you and those you love and like more fully and at a richer level than any solely giving or taking relationship ever could.

Another simple but tried and true remedy to avoid burnout and be on the path to wellness is an old 12-Step saying. H.A.L.T. – Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired. Stop whatever you're doing if you find yourself feeling hungry, angry, lonely or tired and take care of yourself. Those of us with mental health issue especially need to be concerned about sleep and all of us need to eat balanced and nutritious meals. We pay the consequence in short-term mood swings and long-term health consequence if we don't take care of our diet and our sleep. Also, not watching our mood being angry and lonely can often lead to outbreaks of drama attitude at work which will harm your relationship with your colleagues and your supervisor, so taking the time to catch these emotional outburst before they get to big and taking care of yourself in any way necessary is exceedingly important to the long haul wellbeing of your work environment. They also help stop the potential for a more deadly cause of workplace harm called horizontal violence.

Horizontal Violence often starts with gossip and a little friendly slander and then can lead to verbal and emotional abuse all the way to physical violence. It often comes from another form of work place trauma – vicarious trauma, which many of us become victims of because of the nature of our work in hearing the trauma of those we serve. So that either from the aggravation of our co-workers or the vicarious trauma built up from the stories we hear from the peers we serve, we can start to act in ways that harm those we serve or those we work with.

All of this can be stopped by going back to paragraph one and being vulnerable and practicing H.A.L.T. It also doesn't hurt to do things like have mental health support of your own when supporting others and to have colleagues who can share in a positive manner means to improve their work environment. We have also attached a wellness plan that is an important tool in staying healthy on a daily basis. Since knowing the signs of when you are not doing well and the steps you can take to get back on a path of wellness are exceeding important. So good luck, and may you truly enjoy the work you do for yourself and others.